

# HARTFORD STREET ZEN CENTER "NEWS"

57 Hartford Street -- Phone: 863-2507 -- Email: [hszc108@yahoo.com](mailto:hszc108@yahoo.com) -- Website: [www.hszo.org](http://www.hszo.org) -- July, 2007



## The Practice of Immersing, Entering and Bringing Harmony ---Rev. Myo Lahey 6/17/06

There's that old Zen saying: "All the Buddhas of antiquity don't know it is, but cats and cows know it is." You look at him [Buckley, our temple cat, is in the zendo] and you think, it's true and it's also not true. They know it is and yet they can't pass it on very well. They can't have disciples very well. You could look at this as an abstraction but it's more like an ornament.

This is how we're instructed to practice actually - just sit down. Someone asked what to tell people when giving zazen instruction. I was telling Jeff you should spend most of the time on mechanics, on how to arrange your legs and how your back should be, so that you can sit in a way that's healthy and will support your effort, but the effort is the tricky part because the effort is to desist.

This is very mysterious. How do you make an effort to desist? But that is the acquaintance that everyone makes in his/her own body-mind over time, the acquaintance with that effort, to stop fiddling with anything, and to arrange the body mind so that it is supported. That's all there is to it. Actually that's all he does, our furry friend over there.

There's another piece that you could say he's missing, which has to do with what Master Zhao Zhou said, "Dogs have Buddha nature, and dogs don't have Buddha nature." I was thinking that we have our three jewels - Buddha, Dharma and Sangha - and during our Full Moon Ceremony, just before the last thing we do, we recite the Three Refuges. The cantor sings, on behalf of everyone, "I take refuge in Buddha." And then everyone responds, "Before all beings, immersing body and mind deeply in the way, awakening true Mind." And then the cantor sings, "I take refuge in Dharma." And then everyone responds, "Before all beings, entering deeply the merciful ocean of Buddha's Way." And then finally, "I take refuge in Sangha." And everyone responds, "Before all beings, bringing harmony to everyone, free from hindrance."

So there are three aspects of practice that are brought forth in this context of taking refuge: there's immersing, there's entering, and then there's bringing harmony. Not all of these are necessarily visible in Buckley's practice. Maybe he has it easier than we do. First we immerse ourselves, immerse body and mind in Buddha's Way. And how you do that depends entirely on karmic and other circumstances. Some people will read all these books about Buddhism. I thought that's how you did it when I was in high school. That was a kind of immersing. And then in senior year, at Catholic boarding school, I just happened to be a 15 minute drive from Suzuki Roshi's Zazen group in Los Altos, so I thought I'd go over and sit with them. That's another kind of immersing, so from reading to cultivating the body-mind through seated meditation.

Some people do recitations, some people focus their body-mind energy on a being like Amitabha Buddha, who is the higher of the two figures on the altar there, the lovely wooden painted Buddha, the figure that Issa particularly loved, Amitabha Buddha, "Limitless Light", and cultivate a connection to Amitabha's vow to create a land where all beings without exception can practice and realize Dharma. So this is another way of immersing. And some people devote themselves to monastic discipline. So there are all

these different ways, and there are tantric practices and practices of good works. The whole gamut is represented. These are all ways of immersing body and mind.

This is so that against the obscure impulses of our karma, we can allow Buddha's teaching to sink in to the point that we recognize that although it is entering in, it is actually reflecting the truth of what is already there. That is the purpose of this time of immersing. Usually it's helpful for people to be somewhat careful about this time, so that they immerse themselves in a careful deliberate and conscious way as opposed to being all over the map. I remember Suzuki Roshi saying that it's better to dig one hole very deeply than a lot of shallow holes. This is an important aspect of the practice of immersing.

After a period of immersing of unknowable length, then there's entering, entering the blissful ocean of Buddha's way. Entering is recognizing our power of kinship with all the Buddhas, our original face, our face before even our parents were born. There is a tradition of thinking of this as if it were a calendar event. Sometimes there are little ceremonial acknowledgements, but basically it's timeless, ongoing. So people who forget that, often their practice can be a little lopsided as a result because they think that something happened then. So there's immersing and then in the conventional sense, this is followed by entering. Buddha's Way means that in your own body-mind, in your own tissues, you recognize the veracity of that teaching. You know it's true because you yourself have tasted it, not because some authority passed it on to you. This is critical.

In East Asia and in certain aspects of East Asian practice, there is this notion that kind of happens all at once. But in fact, this sort of recognition I'd say grows in one over time, perhaps in little discrete leaps, some times in a leap you notice. You may go and talk to your teacher and say, "I've had a leap." And your teacher may be amused and may whack you with a stick [he illustrates]. That is a great compliment because if you were worthless, s/he wouldn't even bother, but if you are a worthy individual, you get a "whack, whack". Then when you enter, it is somehow different. Then Dharma is not your possession but you are the instrument. This is that "merciful ocean". Then your activity in the world is one of bringing harmony. And this is the kind of harmony that escapes from human agendas. You don't necessarily think, "Now I'm going to harmonize these people." It doesn't work that way. In responding to circumstance, responding with body and mind deeply in the Way, harmony is the result, even if it doesn't look particularly harmonious at every given moment. This is the functioning of Buddha's teaching in Sangha, in and among the community of practitioners.

So Buckley is kind of getting warm in the sunlight there, but he doesn't mind. He just sits there in the sun. If you pat him, he purrs. If you bother him, he starts to look crabby. It's hard for us. I'm not as old as Buckley but I'm getting there and I can't always say that I don't mind. Sometimes I mind when my body doesn't respond the way it used to, when I go to cross my legs and my knee goes, "Ouch, wait." So this is our karma of body, speech and mind presenting itself over and over again, and challenging our ability to practice like Buckley practices. When there's sun, you curl up in the sun. When there's no sun, you curl up somewhere else. And if you can't curl up, then you just don't



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curl up. That's it. This is practicing like an idiot, like we said this morning in our chant. This is how cats and cows know it is, in that way. The Buddhas and ancestors have not deceived us - what they say is true. In this process of going for refuge, the process of immersing, entering and bringing harmony, you find that out for yourself. That's all that Hartford Street Zen Center is about; it's all we do. Beyond that, it doesn't matter if there's a Hartford Street or not. The real estate is valuable, the garden is very nice, thanks to the tireless labors of Jennifer and David. Those are lovely things in and of themselves, but the nucleus has to be our ongoing discovery of Buddha's Way, bringing it into the world so that this harmony of Sangha can extend wider and wider. Goodness knows it's necessary. [Looking at Buckley] THAT I cannot do - I can no longer nibble on my own toes.

Maybe consider your own practice, if you wish, in terms of immersing entering and bringing harmony- and see that as the backdrop of going for refuge. See that at the root of taking refuge is a pearl of knowledge, namely, that there is such a thing as awakening. And as the Dalai Lama says, as long as there's time and space, may our remaining within the sphere of becoming, be for the sake of all beings: may all our awakenings be for the sake of all that suffer.

## MORNING (Monday-Friday)

5:30am-6:10 Zazen - Sitting Meditation

6:10am-6:20 Kinhin - Walking Meditation

6:20am-7:00 Zazen

7:00am-7:20 Chanting (Service)

7:20am-7:35 Soji - Temple Cleaning

## EVENING (Monday-Friday)

6:00pm-6:40 Zazen

6:40pm-6:50 Chanting

## SATURDAY MORNING

6:30am-7:15 Zazen

7:15am-7:35 Chanting

7:35am-7:55 Soji

[BREAK]

9:10am-9:50 Zazen

10:00am-11:00 Dharma Talk followed by tea/cookies.

SUNDAYS and HOLIDAYS - Closed

## RETREATS and INSTRUCTION:

\* 1-day retreats (1st Saturdays of the month)

\* Zazen instruction (brief form) 8:30am (2nd/4th Saturdays) and long form, 1pm, Third Saturdays with pre-registration.

## Feline Zen Corner

### "Sniffing Rose" by Buckley (Allen Balderson)

I've probably said this before, but the garden is my favorite place to be, especially this time of year. When my furless friends join me after zazen, that's what I call having a good time. Sure I like the attention, but I can just hang out in another part of the garden by myself and listen to the sound of their voices. It makes me happy. I purr but not too loudly. I don't want them to hear me and get big heads.

My human friends like the same things that I do about the garden. While they don't talk about the dry dirt I like to roll around in or the bees, the flies or all the other buggies (beetles are my favorite, but ants are pretty cool too) they often mention the flowers. They actually give them names. Among others, there's Rose, Iris, Violet, and one is even a man because he has a beard. But he's also called Iris, maybe because this is the Castro.

I'm a cat so I don't see colors like humans do - it's all green and blue to me. But my human friends can see all kinds of colors.



Today they were staring at Iris, you know the one that needs a shave. "It looks kind of pink," said one. Another added, "No, it's more mauve." "I know it's not corral because it's not orange enough," chimed in another. Then one of my friendly zazenites,

sometimes I like to call them that, stood up and said, "Speaking of orange. Look over here!" There seems to be a corner of the garden that has all orange flowers. Humans can be so creative.

Well, just because I can't see all the colors, doesn't mean I can't enjoy sniffing the flowers. Have you ever sniffed Rose? She's one good smelling babe.

Another conversation came up in the garden today that I'm not quite ready to discuss yet: "Who is more butch - Bea Arthur or Eve Arden?" I overheard Elaine Stritch isn't in the running. Like some colors, it's foreign to me. Meow! (Note: Photo-Bob Craig)

## JULY DATES TO REMEMBER

July 2- 4 - Zendo Closed - Holiday

July 7 - One Day Retreat

July 11 - Board of Directors Meeting

## Upcoming Events:

August 19: Gay Men's Retreat on Transforming Depression with Lee Lipp (sponsored by Gay Men's Buddhist Sangha).

## Thank You's and Congratulations:

Thanks to: Rev. Michael McCormick for his Dharma talk, Albert Kaba for hosting the Annual Meeting lunch, and to Victoria Austin for her "sold-out" yoga event, which we hope to offer again soon. Congratulations to Joe McInerney, Amy Grant and Jim Shalkham on their Jukai.

=== Alex Jacobs on Buckley-san's Samurai Spirit ===



I think everyone has heard the expression, "Cat's have 9 lives." I didn't actually understand what that meant until living with Buckley-san. As mellow as he seems, he's not one to pass up a chance to defend his backyard territory, fighting tooth and claw, if necessary.

At least twice now, I've seen Buckley spend entire days in the house recovering from particularly nasty fights. One that left him with a scarred and folded ear, and one that left no noticeable marks, but reduced him to a moaning lump of black fur, resigned to lie in the middle of the staircase up to the second floor.

As poorly as he may have appeared to feel, he has always sprung back to health after a few days. Yet, as it seemed to me, he was not the same cat he was before the incident. And the change doesn't always make logical sense. Sometimes he actually seems to act a little younger. Meowing more, or perhaps becoming more affectionate. As if he had shed a previous life, to begin anew, refreshed. What a mysterious little fellow. May your remaining lives be plentiful!